THE POETIC SPIRIT - Philip Lamantia.
San Francisco Art Institute, Summer 1979.

I: What is poetry? (Part One)

1. Poetic theory of the nature of language.
2. Primitive expressions in pre-capitalist formations.
   a. Readings in texts translated from the languages of the Costanoan Indians of the San Francisco Bay Area.
   b. Dream life, myth-making, magical art.
   c. Childhood sources.
3:... Magic: The Flesh & Blood of Poetry by Benjamin Péret.
4. Present theory: positive negation and subsequent imaginary transformations of given reality.
   a. Dialectics of presentation and representation.
   b. Audial-verbal imagination as primary and its elaboration into visual thought. Comparisons with the primary visual fields of the plastic arts.

II: What is poetry?(Part Two)

1. Recapitulation of Part One with discussion of theoretic & poetic texts previously furnished.
2. From Hegel's Aesthetics to Surrealism.
3. Present perspectives as guide to the reevaluation of the poetic past in English and American sources since Colonial times.
   a. Historical considerations. Ex.: revolutionary movements and their interrelations with the poetic sensibility.
4. Examples of the unintended eruption of the poetic marvelous in Early American writings: Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World and in Jonathan Edwards. Colonial America's most widely-read poem, Michael Wigglesworth's The Day of Doom.

III: Survey of pre-romanticism: William Collins and Edward Young's Night Thoughts and his essay, Conjectures On Original Composition in England; and William Blake. In America: The House of Night by the Revolutionary poet, Philip Freneau.

2. Romanticism and the Gothic sensibility. In England: Shelley's A Defence of Poetry. The poetic qualities in the Gothic novels of Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe, Monk Lewis and Maturin. In America: Charles Brockden Brown's Weiland and the gothic-romantic exfoliations of Edgar Allan Poe. Little known texts of Poe's poetics and poetry will be explored & discussed.
3. Emily Dickinson.

IV: Mid-and-later Nineteenth Century currents.

1. Emily Bronte; Elizabeth Barrett Browning.
2. The Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
3. The revolutionary poetics of certain key figures of world significance: Baudelaire, Rimbaud and the incomparable, Isidore Ducasse, Comte de LAUTREAMONT, the nominal author of MALDOROR, culmination point of romanticism and its supersession into surrealism.
4. Symbolism. Swinburne.
5. Post-romantic subjectivism and the reaction against it by turn-of-the-century.

V: The Twentieth Century.

1. High poetic expression in early period: Samuel Greenberg in America (1893-1917).
2. American dada and avant-garde currents in the 1920's.
   a. Mina Loy. Harry Crosby.
3. Claude McKay.
4. The Californian super-romantic poet, Clark Ashton Smith.
5. The neo-gothic & weird romances of H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and other American writers of the "Cthulu-mythos": Frank Bellnap Long, et. al.
6. Surrealism in England: David Gascoyne by 1934.

VI: Surrealist poetic theory.

1. Survey of the poetic surrealism in Breton's key manifesto of 1924.
2. Crucial importance of Freud's theories of sexuality, dreams and the interrelations of conscious and unconscious psychical life.
3. Psychic automatism. Discovery of automatic writing.
4. Poetic analogy. Reading & discussion of... Rising Sign by André Breton, included in the required text, WHAT IS SURREALISM?, pgs. 280-283.
5. Surrealist interpretation of Marx's materialist dialectic.
6. Poetry and Revolution.

VII: Beyond literature: poetic expression in American blues songs, movies, comic books, animated cartoons, radio dramas, etc.

1. Detailed discussion of BLUES AND THE POETIC SPIRIT by Paul Caron.
2. Cinematic correspondences: THE SHADOW AND ITS SHADOW by Paul Hammond; also his The Marvelous Méliès.
3. The surrealist movement in the United States. The actual presence of Breton, Ernst, Duchamp and other surrealists in America during World War II. Generally hostile reaction, in spite of a few exceptions, Kamrowski, Gorky in painting; subsequent history traced. Inception of first indigenously organized group in the mid-1960's; public manifestations of 1970's.
4. General condition of poetry in the U.S. since World War II.

VIII: Examination of recent poetic manifestations. Texts by Penelope and Franklin Rosemont, Joseph Jablonski and Nancy Joyce Peters.

Poetic texts translated from other languages into English: Breton, Péret, Eluard, Magloire-Saint-Aude (Haiti), Cesariny (Portugal), etc. and their inspiration for recent American poetic practice.

2. Poetry as spirit of the de-alienation of humanity and its language.
3. Constant mutability of linguistic signs.
4. Another reality surpassing given reality.
5. The poeticization of the world.

Required Text: WHAT IS SURREALISM? Selected Writings of André Breton. Ed. &introduced by Franklin Rosemont. Monad Press, 1978. Student are urged to acquire their copies conveniently at City Lights Book Store, 261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, where copies have been reserved for them and can be requested accordingly. Pr.$8.95

Supplementary Reading List: Lamantia: Poetry Now.

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The Gothic Sensibility

Walpole, Robert (1717-1791): The Castle of Otranto, the first Gothic novel, 1764. Penguin Books; other editions in print.

Radcliffe, Anne (1764-1823): Prolific narrator of the tale of terror. The Mystéries of Udolpho, 1794; The Romance of the Forest, 1791; The Italian, 1797, the latter revealing the character of Schedoni, model for Byron and the "byronic hero". Radcliffe was named "The Spectre" by Lautréamont/. Oxford Univ. Press, paper & hd editions.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory. 1775-1818. The Monk. "Superior in all respects, to the bizzare flashes of the brilliant imagination of Radcliffe" (Sade). In print in U.S. paperback.

Maturin, Charles Robert: 1782-1824. Melmoth the Wanderer, 1820. "Melmoth, the great satantic creation of the Reverand Maturin." (Baudelaire). "The god-father of shadows" (Lautréamont). Paperback.

Sade, D.A.F.de: 1740-1814. "The Marquis de Sade, the freest spirit that ever existed" (Appolinaire). Grove Press translations in print in paperback. Reflections on the Novel (1800) in Grove edition of The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings.

Brown, Charles Brockden. Wieland or the Transformation. First American novelist, late XXXX 18th and early 19th centuries.

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N.B.: The gothic heritage culminates, transformed and purified, in Lautréamont's Maldoror. In America, Poe's tales bear ample evidence of the further evolution of the gothic mode. Poe's 20th century. "heirs" are H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Frank Belknap Long and others of the "Lovecraft circle" inspried by his Cthulhu Mythos. These authors' works are readily obtainable in many current paper back editions, by Panther and Ballantine editions, or, in hardback, issued by Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53383. See Lovecraft's important, exhuastive essay: Supernatural Horror In Literature.

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